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ABSTRACT

The paper reports a visit to the Union of the Blind in Croatia, an organization serving the needs of 4,500 blind individuals in this part of Yugoslavia. Briefly considered are personnel, financial support, and services (such as braille and talking book production). A separate section describes the organization's library, recorded and braille periodicals, the aids and appliances shop, and the museum (which collects and displays things related to the life of blind individuals). Other services for the blind (such as an income subsidy from the state and reduced transportation costs) are noted. The school for the blind currently serving 210 students at the primary and secondary levels is described. Briefly noted are trips to the National and University Library and Tito's birthplace. (DB)

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REFLECTIONS
ON A VISIT TO
THE UNION OF THE BLIND OF CROATIA
ZAGREB, YUGOSLAVIA

by

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Preface

The following notes on a visit to programs designed to serve blind individuals in Croatia, Yugoslavia, were made possible by the many kindnesses shown by Professor Antun Lastric, Director of Cultural, Educational and Informational Affairs, Union of the Blind of Croatia, who also serves as Librarian. The interpreting assistance of Ms. Jadranka Lednenko and Mrs. Davorka Grenac proved invaluable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	ii
Introduction	1
Union of the Blind of Croatia	1
Library for the Blind	3
Periodicals	4
Aids and Appliances	5
Museum	6
Treatment of and Services for the Blind	7
School for the Blind	7
National and University Library	9
Tour to Tito's Birthplace	10
Footnotes	12

Introduction

Prior to attending 1981 meetings of the Round Table of Libraries for the Blind, International Federation of Library Associations in Leipzig, German Democratic Republic, the authors visited The Union of the Blind of Croatia in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Arriving in Zagreb on August 10, 1981, they spent five days talking with Professor Antun Lastric and the Union staff, visiting appropriate institutions, and absorbing service and facility nuances.

Immediately on leaving the airport a meeting was scheduled in the Board Room of the Union. This main public room is where the President receives guests and handles important matters. The decor is green--from the walls and curtains to the large felt-covered conference table.

Trophies for skiing, chess, bowling, swimming and "beep signal" ball are on shelves. A portrait of President Tito as a young man hangs on the wall.

It was from this room that all visits to observe service related programs were coordinated by Professor Lastric.

Union of the Blind of Croatia

The Union of the Blind of Croatia was established in 1946 to serve the needs of the 4,500 blind individuals living in Croatia.[1] It is one of six similar organizations in Yugoslavia--each autonomous Republic having its own association or union.

Activity in all six associations is coordinated by the Union of the Blind of Yugoslavia. The work of twenty-three additional

organizations designed to serve specific needs of blind individuals is similarly coordinated.

Work of The Union of the Blind of Croatia is directed by a Secretary, Professor Ante Sedic, who governs forty employees in three separate but equal departments:

Department of Culture/Information/Education;

Department of Employment/Rehabilitation/
Social and Medical Care; and

Department of Distribution of Aids and
Appliances.

Financial support for the organizations is derived from state funds, industrial donations, and from the sales of aids and appliances, as well as from the proceeds derived from the sale of items produced in a sheltered workshop.

The Union of the Blind of Croatia is located in a modern three-story building of 3,000 square meters in Zagreb. The building houses:

Administrative Services

Library[2]

Braille Production Facilities

Talking Book Production Facilities

Museum

Theater of 430 seats

Professional Group

Amateur Group

Library for the Blind

Professor Antun Lastric established the Library, Union of the Blind of Croatia, in 1965.

Professor Lastric attended the University of Philosophical Sciences, Zagreb, and majored in Yugoslavian and Slavic literature. Born with weak sight he lost his ability to read and travel in 1960. At that time, armed with a B.A. degree and well on the way to an M.A. he joined the Union. The library is a monument to his imagination and tenacity.

The library received an acknowledgment from President Tito for work well done and, in 1980, received the IVAN KUKULJEVIC award from the Library Association of Croatia.[3]

Recorded books, narrated by professional actors, are paid on an hourly basis.[4] Conditions are modern and state-of-the-art equipment is utilized.

Two studios are utilized to produce ninety (90) books each year on both open reel and cassette tape. Three recorded magazines are produced in Croatian and two in Esperanto. The magazines are devoted to science and culture, politics and popular essays.

Each narrator reads no longer than four hours in the air conditioned atmosphere. Three copies of each book are produced.

Though there is a mail provision for "free matter for the blind" completed books, in plastic pouches with a compact handle, are delivered by automobile directly to the homes of users. Trains are used to deliver material to those residing outside of Zagreb. The automobile delivery service was instituted in 1976 with support from

the members of Parliament, Republic of Croatia.

All materials are being cataloged using the Universal Decimal Classification System. Titles produced from 1965 to 1980 were arranged in alphabetical order by author and are currently being converted to UDC.

There is no censorship and a broad variety of material is offered--including translations of works by Erika Jong and Irwin Shaw.

Two hundred and fifty (250) braille books in three copies are produced each year using modern press braille technology. Plastic plates, rather than zinc, are utilized. These plates can produce up to 1,000 impressions with no loss in cell height.[5] The paper utilized is of especially high quality.[6]

Periodicals

Legal and financial resources permit the publication of eleven magazines: five braille, five recorded, one print.

Blind staff members select items to be included in the braille and recorded versions. Sighted staff compile the print periodical.

Recorded periodicals:

Choice: Articles from Yugoslavian newspapers

Science and Arts: Cultural articles

Politics and Self Management

Esperanto Magazines (2): One covers world activities; one Yugoslavian events. Subscribers are from Yugoslavia, United States, Switzerland, Federal Republic of Germany, German Democratic Republic, and Canada.

Braille periodicals:

Choice: Same as recorded.

The Word of the Blind: News of Yugoslavian organizations of the blind--with original articles.

The Woman: Selections from selected women's periodicals.

Chess: Articles prepared by N. Dragun Nikola, the Yugoslavian blind chess champion.

The Youth: Articles of interest to children up to 16 years.

Print periodical:

Social Thought: Concerns of the blind. Selected original and reprinted articles from many organizations throughout the world.

Aids and Appliances

A comprehensive Aids and Appliances Shop is maintained by the Union. Pull page and nine-line braille slates are imported from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and are sold at cost.

Playing cards, Yugoslavian and Hungarian, with braille markings, canes and especial switchboard lights are manufactured and available for purchase.

In total more than fifty different articles are in stock awaiting selection and purchase by blind individuals. The range of games--chess to parcheesi--balls with bells, braille clocks and braille scales is impressive.

Museum

The Tifloloski Muzej Jugoslavije (Typhlological Museum of Yugoslavia) was established in 1953. It has a responsibility to collect, classify and display things related to the life of blind individuals--past and present.

The museum displays materials, which, when viewed in context, will overcome social prejudice.

A tour of the museum, located at Senoina 34/III, Zagreb--the third floor of the Union building--first reveals easy methods used by blind individuals to communicate--knotted ropes, cut out raised letters and braille printing "slugs." Next, one finds an 1889 braille tablet developed by Vinko Bek (1862-1955) who founded the first school for blind children in Zagreb. The first example of a book is the Croatian version of Pocetnica za Zlijepce (Handbook for the Blind). Next was a picture of V. Ramadanovic (1884-1943) who founded a music school for blind children in Serbia in 1924.

War heroes, blinded in action, are featured with a special treatment given the life of Jovan Nikolic--an outstanding Partisan.

Relief maps produced in 1927 are displayed as are the sculpture of R. Gjumisic and authors J. Nikolic and S. Saric. Especially attractive sculptured horses, cows, pigs and other animals produced by Ivan Ferlano are displayed in a separate area. Wood-carvings by Miss Remzija Gjumisic represented masks as well as human features and figures.

Curator Durda Bojanic makes an especial effort to preserve book materials, photographs, articles and all written material on the blind in a special library area established for the purpose.

Treatment of and Services for the Blind

The Union of the Blind of Croatia is specialized in order to meet the specialized needs.

Blind individuals receive a special income subsidy from the state, in addition to other benefits. There is a fair employment law and one covering educational benefits.

Six times during a twelve-month period blind individuals may travel by train or bus at a 75 percent reduction in the fare--with an accompanying person traveling at no cost. Air travel has a 50 percent reduction.

In Yugoslavia there are special schools for the blind. In Zagreb there is a primary boarding school and a secondary school. In Osijek there is an adult rehabilitation center. During the last 15 years mainstreaming has become popular--with itinerant teachers of braille utilized in a regular manner.

Braille textbooks and other background material are provided by the Union in 20 to 100 copies--depending upon need. Plans are under way to provide large type (14-point) books.

Employment matters are based upon the socialist philosophy of the U.S.S.R. which cites the independence of blind people in life and at work. This, combined with work of a blind partisan, Parlu Konticu, and studies of blind individuals in Belgrade, the philosophy of Socijalna Misao was developed.

School for the Blind

The Vinko Bek School for the Blind in Zagreb was established

in 1895--the first such institution on the Balkan Peninsula. It was originally part of the Joseph Klein School for the Blind, Austria--which was established in 1804. Mr. Dane Palijan serves as headmaster.

Students are enrolled in pre-school, elementary school or in secondary level programs. Children in the two lower sections board at the institution--secondary students live in adjacent approved housing.

There are 210 students attending classes during the 1981-1982 school year. One hundred and thirty are in primary grades and eighty in the secondary level school. Most are multiply handicapped and 60 percent are male.

As noted earlier most textbooks are provided by The Union of the Blind of Croatia. They are in braille, recorded or large print versions. In the elementary grades the largest print books are utilized. Print is reduced in upper grade books.

Students in the secondary school are trained as switchboard operators, interpreters, and stenographers.

All instructors are licensed teachers who have been exposed to at least one course in teaching handicapped students.

Braille is taught. Primary students learn Croatian and English braille--Grade I. Elementary students learn Croatian and English braille Grade II. Secondary students study Croatian, English Grade II and German Grade II braille.

Funding comes from the Republic of Croatia, other Yugoslavian states who enroll students, and from various social welfare organizations.

Throughout Yugoslavia there are similar blind schools located in:

Belgrade

Bitola

Kumanovo

Ljubljana

Ohrid

Osijek

Pristina

Sarajevo

Skofja Loka

Titograd

Zagreb

Zemun

National and University Library

The Nacionaina i Sveucillisna Biblioteka (National and University Library) was founded early in the 17th century by members of the Roman Catholic order of the Society of Jesus. In 1606 the Jesuit tie was broken and many of the books moved to Budapest.

Through the years the nature of the institution changed--from a Jesuit library to a collection for the academy of science to a joint National/University library. The first copyright collection was established in 1816 when all Hungarian books were, by law, deposited. Currently copies of all materials published in Yugoslavia are received and accessioned.

The current collection includes more than 1,100,000 volumes,

186 incunabula, 4,700 rare Yugoslav books, and more than 5,200 manuscripts in addition to 7,400 prints, 15,000 maps, 13,700 music scores, 5,450 records, and 3,500 microform items.

The current building was built over the period 1911-1913 with all items moved in by 1918. The handcrafted building seats 250 individuals in the central reading room--served by five floors of compact stacks. The recessed sculpture by Ms. Mila Volsedelek and the representation of "culture" by Vlaho Bukovac--complimented by the photograph of President Tito--creates an ambient atmosphere and serves readers well.

Following a trip to the Rare Book Department which held many incunabula and a copy of the Kroatischer Korrespondent, the first German language newspaper in Croatia, the library literature collection and automation work areas were visited.

The library literature section held an up-to-date collection of books and serials. Work was beginning on creation of a machine-readable bibliographic database.

Tour to Tito's Birthplace

Following an afternoon visit to Tito's birthplace the authors were guests of Mr. Dragutin Krizanec for dinner at his charming countryside restaurant.

Mr. Krizanec, one of the founders of The Union of the Blind of Croatia in 1946, is now President, Association of the Blind, Krapina. The association includes 133 members from six municipalities. Twenty-three members are employed, eighteen are on pension, and others are students or older individuals who

receive state support. Mr. Krizanec organizes employment opportunities and provides social occasions. All members of the Association were born in the Krapina area and perform normal work tasks. Farm work includes taking kernals from corn, hanging tobacco to dry, milking cows and making baskets. All students are integrated into the regular school system.

Mr. Krizanec's restaurant, established in 1978, is called "Little Red Riding Hood." The decor is red, with a large oil portrait of Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf on the dining room wall. Mrs. Krizanec dresses in red, wears a red hood, and acts as hostess. Mr. Krizanec's son serves as the waiter.

The meal served was provided in a friendly atmosphere of serenity with "Welcome Dear Friend" sung by Vice Vukov. The song was first sung at a festival in Krapina ten years ago--where it received a first prize.

FOOTNOTES

[1]There are few deaf-blind individuals in Yugoslavia. There is no recorded successful employment history. At the present time there is one girl in primary school.

[2]In addition to the Library in Zagreb there are libraries in Belgrade, Ljubljana, and Sarajavo. However, braille and recorded materials are produced only in Zagreb.

[3]Ivan Kukuljevic was an 18th century politician who was the first man to speak Croatian in the Croatian Parliament. All before him spoke Latin.

[4]Narrators are employed on a full time basis by Radio Zagreb and also work in local theater groups.

[5]Plastic Braille Plate Material

Plava Pastika	=	Name
CTF-BPP 1230 (5015)	=	Stock Number
"Cetinka" 58240 Trilj Yugoslavia	=	Supplier

[6]Braille Paper

Tvornica Papira "Radece"
61433 Radece
Yugoslavia

REFERENCE

Tifloloski Muzej Slijepih Jugoslavije - Zagreb, Draskoviceva, 80/2, 1981, 14 p.